

Eminent composer Sudhir Phadke passes away at 83



Sudhir Phadke's son Shridhar dusts off a family photograph at his residence on Monday — Vasant Prabhu

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
JULY 29, 2002

SUDHIR Vinayak Phadke, also known as Babuji, the maker of *Veer Savarkar* and composer of *Geet Ramayana*, passed away at a city hospital at 10.30 am on Tuesday. Until days before his demise, the 83-year-old music director and singer had nursed plans to release his last film in the South and take the story of Savarkar, as he knew him, to more people.

With 110 films (20 in Hindi) to his credit, this bilingual composer who set a distinct trend in Bhav Geet, was a recognised freedom fighter who carried with him memories of the Goa Liberation Movement of 1954. Phadke, president of the Savarkar Darshan Pratisthan, never tired of saying on every public

platform, that he wanted every Indian to know about Savarkar.

His ambition to produce a full-length feature film in Hindi, Marathi and English on the revolutionary eventually bore fruit after many controversies and production hurdles.

Phadke was admitted to Hinduja Hospital on July 23 after a brain haemorrhage, two days before his 83rd birthday. At 12, Shankar Niwas, Dadar, where Phadke spent his last 40 years, his grand-daughter now remembers him as "a strict but loving grandfather. He always insisted that children finish all the food on their plate. As I grew up I realised he was very particular that everybody, especially the youth, watch *Veer*

▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 3
OBITUARY ON PAGE 3

from the front page

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Savarkar" says Swapna Phadke. "On the 24th he recognised me, held my hand to his lips. That was the last time..." Daughter-in-law Chitra remembers that in the past months, Phadke was busy with plans to dub the film in South Indian languages. "He wanted to get it tax-free across the country. We'll see that the work continues."

Phadke was born on July 25, 1919 in Kolhapur, started his career with His Master's Voice way back in 1941. In 1946 he joined the Prabhat Film Company, Pune, as music director, then went on to win the Rashtrapati award for his home production *Haa Maaza Marga Ekala*.

According to Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray, Babuji alongwith Ga Di Madgulkar and Raja Paranjpe changed the face of Marathi cinema. "They took Marathi cinema to its peak. Now only memories are left," said Thackeray.

Thackeray's friendship with the late Sudhir Phadke spanned over two decades. Despite his ill-health, Phadke travelled all over Maharashtra and attended functions presided over by Thackeray. "Completing *Veer Savarkar* was his life's dream. He worked tirelessly and went into minute details to make the film. Mere words cannot express how I feel at his demise. He never cared about money. Despite financial difficulties, Babuji single-minded pursued his dream," said Thackeray.

Listeners across Maharashtra have tuned in for years to the 56 songs of Phadke's Geet Ramayana, now translated into Hindi, Gujarathi, Bengali, Assami, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Sanskrit and Konkani with-

out a single note changed by translators.

Geet Ramayana was the only AIR programme of 1955-56 which ran for 56 weeks non-stop and Phadke performed the compositions at 1,800 concerts in India and abroad. He organised the first Marathi film festival in USA and Canada in 1982. The awards he won include the Dinanath Mangeshkar award (1998) Lata Mangeshkar Award (2001) and Alpha Jeevan Gaurav Puraskar (2001).

Phadke's music encompassed various styles including *arati*, *abhang*, *lavani*, *tamasha*, *ragas* and western music. He worked with leading playback singers like Lata Mangeshkar, Asha Bhosale, Mohammed Rafi, Manna Dey, Kishore Kumar, Anuradha Paudwal and Mukesh. Phadke later founded the Sulashri Pratisthan to encourage young, promising artists of Indian classical music with scholarships.

Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh condoled Phadke's demise. "Despite all odds, Phadke took upon himself the huge responsibility of ensuring that the task of nurturing music was completed. Not only did Phadke manage to carve a niche for himself in the field of Marathi films and music, but also contributed immensely towards awakening the rich values inherited by the Maharashtrian community," he said. With Phadke's death, the country has lost an eminent artist who staunchly supported the propagation of quality art in every phase of life, he said.

Acting Governor C K Thakker said, "Phadke was not only a great playback singer, but the dedication with which Babuji devoted himself to the task of making *Veer Savarkar* was unparalleled. Even though he will no longer be with us, his voice will remain with us for many more years."